DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 878 CG 016 745

AUTHOR Patrizi, Fredric M.
TITLE Self-Attitude Enhancement through Positive Mental Imagery.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (90th, Washington, DC, August 23-27, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; College Students; Higher Education; Personality Traits; *Psychotherapy; *Relaxation Training; *Self Concept; *Visualization
IDENTIFIERS *Mental Imagery

ABSTRACT

Enhanced self-attitudes following a psychotherapeutic encounter almost always serve as an indicator of therapy success. In an attempt to enhance self-attitudes through the use of positive mental imagery, undergraduate students (N=72), divided into 4 groups, participated in 4 experimental sessions. The experimental groups imagined themselves exhibiting 10 different desirable personality characteristics (positive imagery) identified as being either common or uncommon self-attributes. The control groups imagined themselves in 10 different outdoor scenes (neutral imagery). To examine the effects of relaxation training on vividness of imagery, two of the groups learned relaxation techniques. All groups participated in three imagery sessions either with or without relaxation training. In the fourth session, which they believed was part of another experiment, the students completed the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and a revised Fishbein and Ajzen-type scale of self-attitude, containing the 10 personality characteristics used in the positive imagery condition. Statistical analyses showed that positive imagery significantly affected self-attitude in a positive direction on the Fishbein and Ajzen-type scale but not on the other measures. Enhanced self-attitude resulted primarily from an increase in the affective evaluation of the 10 uncommon personality characteristics. (Author/WAS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED230878

Self-Attitude Enhancement Through Positive Mental Imagery

(32.1, Social, attitude/attitude change)

Fredric M. Patrizi, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
East Central University
Ada, Oklahoma 74820

CG 016745

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Fredric M. Patrizi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SELF-ATTITUDE ENHANCEMENT THROUGH POSITIVE MENTAL IMAGERY

Fredric M. Patrizi, Ph. D.

East Central University

In th's study subjects were asked to imagine themselves exhibiting ten different desirable personality characteristics (positive imagery) which were identified as being either common or uncommon self-attributes. A control group was asked to imagine themselves in ten different outdoor scenes (neutral imagery). In addition, the effects of relaxation training on vividness of imagery were examined. All groups participated in three imagery sessions either with or without relaxation training. In a fourth session, which subjects were led to believe was part of another experiment, subjects were administered the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and a devised Fishbein and Ajzen-type scale of self-attitude containing the ten personality characteristics used in the positive imagery condition. Positive imagery was found to significantly affect self-attitude in a positive direction on the Fishbein and Ajzen-type scale but not on the other measures. Enhanced self-attitude was due primarily to an increase in the affective evaluation of the ten uncommon personality characteristics.

Self-Attitude Enhancement Through

Positive Mental Imagery

Recognizing that attitude toward one's self is probably the most important attitude for individual functioning and well being, the present study attempted to enhance self-attitude through the use of positive mental imagery. Traditionally, self-attitude has been subsumed under a variety of related concepts such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-image, and other indices of self-assessment. In this study, self-attitude was operationally defined using the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) attitude model with the self as the attitude object. A low level of self-attitude has been identified as the most common debilitating factor for clients who seek psychotherapy (Murray & Jacobson, 1971). Conversely, enhanced self-attitude following psychotherapeutic encounter almost always serves as an indicator of success and has been identifed as a primary goal of psychotherapy (Butler, 1966; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967).

Despite the recognized importance of self-attitude, there have been few attempts to experimentally affect self-attitude as an outcome variable. In addition, the specifics concerning the manner in which self-attitude is altered are seldom explored. Thus, when self-attitude is altered, through psychotherapy or some other method, there is generally little understanding of the components which are responsible for the change.

It is reasonable to turn to the area of social psychology to examine the process of self-attitude formation and change. The Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) attitude model provides a useful framework for the precise measurement of self-attitude by combining the salient beliefs pertaining to the attitude object

along with the affective evaluations of those beliefs in a measure of overall attitude. This measure is obtained by multiplying a belief probability score by an affective evaluation score for each of the salient beliefs pertaining to the attitude object and then summing over the total number of beliefs ($SA=\Sigma be$).

In order to approximate the cognitive process of self-attitude change that is frequently sought in a psychotherapeutic setting, a positive mental imagery technique was used. Sheikh and Panagiotou (1975) have pointed out the similarities in many forms of psychotherapy through their use of techniques which facilitate mental imagery directed towards a change in the client's attitude or behavior.

Therefore, the present study implemented a positive mental imagery technique designed to enhance self-attitude for the purpose of examining the process of attitude change toward the self using the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) attitude model. Since relaxation prior to imagery has also been indicated as a facilitative variable for enhancing vividness of imagery (Singer, 1974), a relaxation condition was included as an independent variable. Several outcomes were, therefore, examined in this study. It was hypothesized, first of all, that relaxation instructions prior to imagery training would result in higher ratings of vividness of imagery than imagery training not preceded by relaxation instructions. Secondly, it was hypothesized that positive mental imagery would result in higher ratings of self-attitude than neutral mental imagery. The study was also designed to examine, in detail, the specifics of attitude change.

Method

Subjects

Seventy-two male and female subjects (18 in each of four experimental

groups) from introductory courses in psychology, sociology, government, and speech participated in the experiment for partial course credit.

Procedure

All subjects were asked to participate in four experimental sessions, approximately one hour in length, spaced over two weeks. The first three sessions consisted of imagery training with or without relaxation instructions. The imagery training sessions were conducted in a small auditorium and included from six to twelve subjects at a time. Session four served as a data-gathering session. In addition, all subjects were asked to practice imagery at home.

All instructions to the subjects were given in the form of audio tape-recorded messages. The four experimental conditions consisted of (1) relaxation with positive imagery, (2) positive imagery, (3) relaxation with neutral imagery, and (4) neutral imagery. Subjects in the relaxation condition were exposed to a progressive relaxation exercise similar to the one originated by Jacobson (1938). Subjects in all conditions were told that the purpose of the experiment was to measure how clearly they could use their imagination to picture different things in their minds. During the imagery phase of the experiment, subjects in the positive imagery condition were presented with a description of ten positive personality characteristics, one-at-a-time, and asked to spend three minutes mentally picturing themselves displaying each of the characteristics in a particular situation. These ten characteristics consisted of five characteristics which were identified in preliminary research as being highly self-descriptive of subjects from the same population (common) in addition to five highly desirable but not necessarily self-descriptive characteristics (uncommon). Anderson (1968) has identified all ten characteristics as being highly desirable. The five common characteristics were friendly, honest, polite, understanding, and dependable. The five uncommon

characteristics were intelligent, competent, creative, calm, and sociable. Subjects were given specific instructions as to the nature of mental images and how they were to be formed.

Subjects in the neutral imagery condition were presented with a brief description of ten outdoor scenes and asked to mentally picture themselves present in the scenes.

Throughout the relaxation and imagery exercises, all subjects were asked to sit with their feet on the floor and backs upright against the backs of their chairs. The lights were dimmend and subjects were asked to keep their eyes closed. At the end of each imagery session subjects were asked to evaluate their imagery using an Imagery Rating Scale designed by the experimenter. This scale consisted of twenty-two adjective pairs (e.g., clear-hazy) in the form of a seven-point semantic differential scale. The summed scores for eleven of these pairs served as a measure of vividness of imagery.

At the conclusion of the third imagery training session, all subjects were told that they were in a compairison group and would not need to practice imagery in their last session. It was explained that they would need to attend the last session in order for them to equate, in terms of time of participation, with the other experimental groups. They were, therefore, instructed to meet in another building for the last session in order to participate in another experiment being conducted by a different experimenter. At this session the experimenter informed the subjects that he was gathering information concerning undergraduate students at the university as well as testing out the usefulness of several measuring instruments to be considered in future research. Each subject was then instructed to fill out the various scales which actually served as the outcome measures for the imagery experiment. These measures included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg,

1965), the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965) and a Fishbein and Ajzen-type self-attitude scale (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) constructed by the experimenter.

The Fishbein and Ajzen-type measure was obtained by embedding the ten positive personality characteristics in a list of 30 other characteristics and asking subjects to rate each characteristic, first, according to their evaluation of the characteristic (seven point semantic differential scale along the axis of good-bad) and, secondly, according to the probability-improbability (seven point semantic differential scale) to which they thought they possessed the characteristic. The scores on the probability (belief) and evaluative indexes of each characteristic were mulitplied by their respective values and summed over the ten characteristics to provide an overall measure of self-attitude ($SA=\Sigma be$). In addition to the usefulness of this instrument as an overall measure of self-attitude, the belief and evaluation indexes can be used in separate analyses. The common and uncommon characteristics can also be subjected to separate analyses.

Results

In view of the fact that all groups reported relatively high levels of relaxation (overall mean of 5.52 on a seven point scale), no significant differences between the groups were observed for either relaxation or vividness of imagery (Split-plot factorial ANOVA; Kirk, 1968). Relaxation and vividness of imagery were found to be significantly correlated ($r=.55$, $p.<.01$, $df=70$).

A completely-randomized factorial ANOVA (Kirk, 1968) revealed significantly higher self-attitude for the positive imagery groups versus the neutral imagery groups on the Fishbein and Ajzen-type overall self-attitude measure ($F=6.17, p.<.05$). No significant differences between the groups were obtained

using the Tennessee Self Concept or the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scales.

Further analysis of the Fishbein and Ajzen measure revealed that the positive imagery groups had significantly higher self-attitude scores on the uncommon ($F=7.64$, $p.<.01$) but not on the common characteristics ($F=3.23$). Separate analysis of the evaluation index of self-attitude revealed a significant interaction for type of imagery by relaxation/non-relaxation on the evaluation ratings for uncommon characteristics ($F=4.59$, $p.<.05$). This effect was primarily due to the difference between the imagery groups in the non-relaxation condition with the positive imagery groups being significantly higher than the neutral imagery groups ($F=14.23$, $p.<.01$; type of imagery at relaxation/non-relaxation). The evaluative ratings of common characteristics were also significantly higher in the positive imagery groups than in the neutral imagery groups ($F=7.30$, $p.<.01$). No significant differences between the groups were obtained on the belief index for either common or uncommon characteristices.

Discussion

The study demonstrates the capacity of a Fishbein and Ajzen-type measure of self-attitude to reveal more detailed and specific experimental results than conventional measures of self-attitude. It can be seen that the significant enhancement of self-attitude prodeced by positive imagery, in this instance, can be narrowed down to the enhanced affective evaluation of personality characteristics. This effect was greater for characteristics not commonly attributed to one's self and when mental imagery was not preceded by relaxation instructions. It appears that relaxation instructions may be unnecessary to produce relaxation when engaging in eyes-closed imagery exercises and may even interfere with imagery effects.

In examining the results, the question which arises immediately is what information is provided by positive imagery that is capable of making one believe that one's imagined personal characteristics are more favorable than they were previously? Since the characteristics were highly favorable to begin with, it is reasonable to assume that a closer examination of them only enhances their attractiveness. There is ample social psychological research, summarized by McGuire (1969) and by Harrison (1977) which indicates that familiarity breeds liking, especially for items which are not familiar (the uncommon self-attributes) and that are inherently likeable to begin with.

As for the greater change in evaluations with regard to the uncommon attributes, a tabulation of Anderson's (1968) likeableness ratings for the common and uncommon attributes revealed that, unintentionally, the mean rating for the common attributes (5.30 on a scale of from 0 to six) was noticeably higher than the mean rating for the uncommon attributes (4.56). Thus, there was a greater potential for change in evaluation contained within the uncommon attributes. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) review a number of attitude change models which use the difference between the initial and the possible attitudinal position to indicate the capacity for and liklihood of attitude change. This discrepancy model is also adopted by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) to indicate both the probability of acceptance of attitude-relevant information and the potential for change. For the positively valued common attributes used in this study, their probability of acceptance was high, because they were inherently likeable to begin with, and their potential for change was greater than that of the common attitudes, because of their lower likeableness ratings (greater discrepancy). It can be hypothesized that imagining these uncommon characteristics made them more familiar and, thus, more likeable and that their

initially lower likeableness rating made their obtained likeableness rating more significant than the common characteristics.

Why did positive imagery fail to affect the beliefs of the subjects regarding the extent to which they possessed desirable characteristics? First of all, the probability that positive imagery alone is not powerful enough to affect self-attribute associations must be considered. Bandura (1969, 1971, 1977), among others, has shown that observing the modeled behavior of others can serve as a powerful source of information for enhancing self-efficacy. In this instance, uncertainty is reduced by providing an example of how the desired behavior is to be performed. This example makes it easier for the observer to believe that he/she also has the ability to perform the behavior. Social psychological research on counter-attitudinal behavior has demonstrated that observing one's own behavior is also a powerful source of information, either positive or negative, for affecting attitude change. Even if information provided by the senses occupies the same perceptual channels as does imagery information, as Marks (1977) contends, the recipient of this information is aware of its source and this awareness, in all likelihood, mediates the influence of informational content upon belief. The perception of actual behavior, by oneself or a model, is probably more believable than the perception of behavior using the imagination. In this case, seeing is believing to a greater extent than imagining is believing.

It is also possible that the failure to produce belief changes in the positive imagery subjects was due to the relatively high level at which most subjects already associated the personality attributes with themselves. The mean belief strength for the neutral imagery subjects was 5.10 for the common and 4.48 for the uncommon attributes (on a scale of 0 to 6). It would have

been easier to increase belief strength in attributes which were less believed in to begin with.

It will be recalled that the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) model involves a circular chain of events involving beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviors. Behaviors influence beliefs and vice versa. A change in either should be reflected by a change in attitude. The present study attempted to change attitude by instituting a belief change technique. It was restricted to the effects of self-produced imagery information upon beliefs and attitude. Although changes in self-attitude were observed, the desired belief changes were not and the self-attitude changes did not generalize to conventional measures of self-attitude. If imagery, alone, is to be effective in altering the beliefs that subjects hold regarding their personality characteristics, it may be necessary to emphasize a gradual progression of imagined behaviors, beginning with those which reflect the present capacities of the subjects, and proceeding to those which are more indicative of the desired characteristics. Such a procedure might serve to reduce the constraints placed upon the belief system of the subjects produced by an attempt to imagine behaviors which are beyond their current capacity to perform. The research on the use of imagery techniques used in behavior therapy, reviewed in Rimm and Masters (1979), indicates that a gradual progression to the desired state is more effective in producing behavior changes than focusing upon a goal state from the beginning. It is suggested that a similar approach may be indicated in attempts to alter beliefs as well.

Given the results of the present study, it is also suggested that the believability of imagery information would be facilitated by the observation of actual behaviors relevant to the imagery content. It would be advisable in future research which attempts to use imagery to enhace self-attitude, to

allow subjects to observe their own or a model's actual performance of behaviors representing desirable characteristics. Rimm and Masters (1979) also review a number of overt modeling procedures which might be incorporated into a design similar to the one used in this study, using the self or another as a covert model, to enhance self-attitude. The use of graduated modeling is also indicated in both overt and covert modeling procedures using either the self or another as the model. A graduated modeling procedure could be incorporated into a design, similar to the present one, which also allows more time for the emergence of the desired behaviors in actuality, or which asks subjects to tabulate and, thus, focus upon instances in which they perform behaviors representative of the positively valued personality characteristics. Another approach might be to set up contrived situations which allow subjects the opportunity to perform the desired behaviors. At any rate, the actual performance of behavior appears to be a powerful variable which should not be ignored in similar research.

In further considering the inability of imagery, alone, to produce positive changes in self-attributed characteristics, the absence of an active, concerned, and supportive therapist may have aided in rendering imagery ineffective. Perhaps the success attributed to imagery techniques in the literature (Sheikh & Panagiotou, 1975; Singer, 1974) requires that imagery be stimulated in an individual session in the presence of an encouraging therapist. Certainly, the dynamic and humanistic approaches to psychoterapy would cite the absence of a therapist as a likely factor for the failure of this study to produce a more powerful effect upon the subject's self-beliefs. The task of projecting oneself beyond one's capacities in a believable manner, either in imagination or actuality, is a difficult one, and perhaps the presence of a highly skilled

and interested other is a motivating factor that must be provided for. In any case, the present study was unable to produce evidence that imagery, alone, is able to alter self-beliefs.

The value of the devised Fishbein and Ajzen-type measure for providing a detailed analysis of attitude change should be readily apparent from the preceding account. A failure or an inability to examine the specific contents of self-attitude using a less precise measure could have led to the erroneous conclusion that enhanced self-attitude was due to a change in the beliefs the subjects had concerning the extent to which they possessed certain personality characteristics, rather than a change in their beliefs about the favorableness of the characteristics. The analysis provided by a model of this type promises to provide the researcher with a greater understanding of the effects of his/her attitude change techniques. This type of model should also aid in the refinement of attitude change techniques. The comprehensiveness of an attitude change technique could be enhanced by allowing the researcher to pinpoint the specific aspects of a subject's attitude structure that are affected or not affected by the technique being used. In the present case, it is apparent that there is much room for further enhancement of self-attitude by providing the subjects with information that is capable of altering their beliefs in the extent to which they possess favorable personality characteristics. The devised self-attitude model used in the present study is offered as a response to the need for "more detailed analysis of the specific processes involved in changes in self-evaluation" called for by Murray and Jacobson (1971).

References

Anderson, N. H. Likeableness Ratings of 555 Personality-Trait Words. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1968, 9, 272-279.

Bandura, A. Principles of Behavior Modification. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

Bandura, A. Psychotherapy Based on Modeling Principles. In A. E. Bergin and S.L. Garfield (Eds.), Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change. New York: Wiley and Sons, 1971.

Bandura, A. Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change. Psychological Review, 1977, 84, 191-215.

Butler, J. M. Self-Acceptance as a Measure of Outcome of Psychotherapy. British Journal of Social Psychiatry, 1966, 1, 51-62.

Fishbein, M. and Ajzen, I. Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975.

Fitts, W. Manual: Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Nashville, Tenn: Counselor Recordings and Tests, 1965.

Harrison, A. A. Mere Exposure. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.) Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. New York: Academic Press, 1977. Pp 40-83.

Jacobson, E. Progressive Relaxation (Rev. ed.). Chicago: University Press, 1938.

Kirk, R. E. Experimental Design: Procedures for the Behavioral Sciences. Belmont, CA.: Brooks/Cole, 1968.

Marks, D. Imagery and Consciousness: A Theoretical Review from an Individual Difference Perspective. Journal of Mental Imagery, 1977, 1, 275-290.

McGuire, W. J. The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change. In G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (Eds.) Handbook of Social Psychology. Vol. III (2nd Ed.) Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969. Pp 136-314.

Murray, E. J. and Jacobson, L. F. The Nature of Learning in Traditional an Behavioral Psychotherapy. In A. E. Bergin and S. L. Garfield (Eds.) Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change: An Empirical Analysis.

Rimm, D. C. and Masters, J. C. Behavior Therapy. New York: Academic Press, 1979.

Rosenberg, M. Society and the Adolescent Self-Image. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Sheikh, A. A. and Panagiotou, N. C. Use of Mental Imagery in Psychotherapy: A Critical Review. Perceptual and Motor Skills, 1975, 41, 555-585.

Singer, J. L. Imagery and Daydream Methods in Psychotherapy and Behavior Modification. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

Truax, C. B., and Carkhuff, R. R. Toward Effective Counseling and Psychotherapy: Training and Practice. Chicago: Aldine Press, 1967.